

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07 INR-07 LAB-04

NSAE-00 RSC-01 SIL-01 CU-02 AID-05 DODE-00 PA-01

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R 291535Z JAN 75

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 0604

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINS, TS

SUBJECT: STUDENTS, TEACHERS INITIATE STRIKES

1. SUMMARY: THE FIRST SIGNIFICANT STRIKE ACTIVITY OF THIS ACADEMIC YEAR HAS BEGUN AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS AND AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AT THE ECOLE NORMALE SUPERIEURE AND THE FACULTIES OF LETTERS, LAW, SCIENCE, AND ENGINEERING IN TUNIS. STRIKE AT ECOLE NORMALE BEGAN JANUARY 21 WHILE STRIKE AMONG SECONDARY TEACHERS AND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS BEGAN JANUARY 28. THERE HAVE BEEN, HOWEVER, NO PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS IN CONNECTION WITH STRIKE AND POLICE HAVE NOT BEEN CALLED IN AS OF JAN 29. END SUMMARY.

2. SECONDARY TEACHERS' STRIKE APPEARS TO BE MOST SERIOUS ASPECT OF MOVEMENT WITH POTENTIAL OF PARALYZING A SIGNIFICANT, NATION-WIDE GOVERNMENTAL FUNCTION. NATIONAL SECONDARY TEACHERS' UNION CALLED AS EARLY AS DECEMBER 8 FOR STRIKE WHICH MATERIALIZED ON JAN 28 AND SOUGHT WIDE SUPPORT AMONG TEACHERS THROUGHOUT COUNTRY. TEACHERS CALLED STRIKE BECAUSE GOT WOULD NOT REINSTATE FIVE FORMER TEACHERS WHO WERE TRIED AND CONVICTED IN STATE SECURITY COURT FOR ANTI-GOT AGITATION AND SUBSEQUENTLY PARDONED. TEACHERS HAVE ALSO MADE SOME DEMANDS IN ECONOMIC SPHERE. JANUARY 28 STRIKE WAS CONFIDENTIAL

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CALLED FOR 24 HOUR PERIOD AND IT WAS APPARENTLY LARGELY

SUCCESSFUL IN TUNIS AREA AND IN OTHER MAJOR POPULATION CENTERS. SECONDARY SCHOOLS WERE BACK TO NORMAL JAN 25 BUT TEACHERS' UNION LEADERS HAVE CALLED FOR RENEWED STRIKE ACTIVITY NEXT WEEK IF GOT DOES NOT RESPOND SATISFACOTILY TO DEMANDS. SO FAR, GOT HAS ATTEMPTED TO DEAL WITH TEACHERS BY REFUSING DEMANDS, BY PUBLICLY NOTING THEIR POLITICAL MOTIVATION, CALLING IT SUBVERSIVE AND "MARXIST-LENINST," AND BY HAVING THE UGTT, TOWHICH TEACHERS' UNION BELONGS, SUSPEND LEADERSHIP THAT ISSUED STRIKE CALL.

3. STRIKE AT ECOLE NORMALE ERUPTED OVER SEPARATE ISSUES RELATED PRINCIPALLY TO INTERNAL AFFAIRS AT MOST PRESTIGIOUS TEACHER TRAINING CENTER IN TUNISIA. STUDENTS DEMANDED RIGHT TO REPEAT FAILED COURSES, TO HAVE CLEARER RULES OF ACADEMIC CREDIT EQUIVALENCY BETWEEN THE ECOLE AND UNIVERSITY FACULTIES, AND NOT TO HAVE SCHOLARSHIP PAYMENTS REDUCED FOR ABSENCE FROM CLASS. STUDENTS HAVE ALSO APPARENTLY DEMANDED RIGHT TO HAVE "REPRESENTATIVE" ORGANIZATIONS (READ STUDENT UNION NOT DOMINATED BY DESTOURIAN SOCIALIST PARTY). ECOLE NORMALE ADMINISTRATION'S RESPONSE TO STUDENT DEMANDS WAS UNSATISFACTORY AND STUDENTS ELECTED TO STRIKE.

4. REASONS BEHIND STRIKE AT UNIVERSITY OF TUNIS MORE OBSCURE BUT PROBABLY RELATED TO TRADITIONAL ISSUES WHICH HAVE FIRED ANTI-GOT STUDENT ACTIVISTS IN RECENT YEARS, I.E., PSD DOMINATION OF STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS, PAST REPRESSION OF STUDENT AGITATION, GENERAL DISCONTENT WITH GOT POLICIES AND UNCERTAINTIES RE PERSONAL CAREER PROSPECTS. TIMING DOUBTLESS REFLECTS POSITIVE RESPONSE TO APPEALS FROM SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS FOR SOLIDARITY WITH THEIR STRIKE CALL. UNIVERSITY INSTRUCTORS REPORTEDLY SERIOUSLY CONSIDERED JOINING STUDENTS IN STRIKE, AND IN FACT DID SO AT SCIENCE FACULTY.

5. IN RECENT WEEKS GOT HAS TAKEN MORE CONCILIATORY ATTITUDE TOWARD YOUTH IN PUBLIC STATEMENTS, PROBABLY IN HOPE OF COAXING THEM BACK INTO ONE-PARTY FOLD. THESE STRIKES ARE FIRST TEST FOR THAT ATTITUDE AND IT REMAINS CONFIDENTIAL

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TO BE SEEN IF GOT HANDLING OF STRIKES (WHETHER BY DEEPLY RESENTED USE OF POLICE ON CAMPUS AS LAST YEAR OR BY MORE CONCILIATORY TACTICS) WILL PROVOKE MORE SERIOUS PROBLEMS. EFFECTIVENESS OF SECONDARY TEACHERS' STRIKE, ALTHOUGH DENIED BY GOT IN CONTROLLED PRESS, IS ATTESTED TO BY HEAVY ATTENTION GIVEN TO IT IN CONDEMNATORY EDITORIALS. TONE OF THESE EDITORIALS INDICATES THAT GOT HEADED FOR CONFRONTATION WITH TEACHERS. SO LONG

HOWEVER, AS STRIKERS CONTINUE TO STAY WITHIN SCHOOL
PREMISES, RATHER THAN CARRY PROTEST TO STREETS OF TUNIS,
IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC ORDER ARE MINIMAL. STRIKING TEACHERS
DO APPEAR HAVE CONSIDERABLE PUBLIC SUPPORT, GROUNDED IN BELIEF
THEY ARE INADEQUATELY PAID AND IN BELIEF TEACHERS' UNION
ACTED RESPONSIBLY IN MAKING THEIR DEMANDS KNOWN AND
GIVING THE REQUIRED ONE MONTH'S NOTICE OF INTENT TO STRIKE.
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